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SUBJECT: PRT/Jalalabad: Afghanistan Returnees Create
Success

KABUL 00004368 001.2 OF 003

¶1. (U) Summary: The Tangi returnee settlement is an excellent example of what can happen in a barren desert when an organized group of people decides to build a home for themselves. With only minimal assistance from international and local donors and their own government, a group of former Afghan refugees forced out of Pakistan in 2005 found a location, built homes, got their children into tent schools with community members as teachers, and are on the verge of gaining recognition for their self-built village as a part of Jalalabad City and Nangarhar Province. The achievements of this community serve as a model of what can be done in Afghanistan with good leadership, tenacity, optimism, and hard work. The part played by the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) provides an example of how PRTs can make a difference, even in the absence of major funding. End Summary.

A Camp in the Desert

¶2. (U) Tangi returnee settlement is like a lot of other settlements throughout Nangarhar Province, and probably throughout Afghanistan. It is located a few kilometers northeast of Jalalabad City in a rocky, barren valley between two rows of hills, with no visible water or vegetation. A group of over 2000 Afghan refugees, originally from Kunar Province, moved to this location after they were forced to leave a refugee camp in Pakistan in the late summer of 2005. Tangi was not an officially

recognized returnee area, but the group was permitted to settle temporarily in this spot because no one else was there or seemed to want the land.

13. (U) Shortly after their arrival in country in April 2006, the Civil Affairs Team from the Jalalabad PRT visited Tangi. They found small tents and one-room shelters that had been put up with the assistance of UNHCR to allow the returnees to get through their first winter. Although unsuccessful in an attempt to dig their own well, the settlement benefited from several wells with hand pumps that were put in with international and Afghan NGO assistance.

The Desert Transformed

14. (U) When spring came, the returnees got to work in earnest, and the visitors in April saw the early stages of layout and building of standard Afghan walled compounds. The village had received iron beams and wooden door and window frames from UNHCR. Using those resources and, mud hauled by tractor from the Kunar River seven kilometers away, the residents were building extensions to the one-room shelters and additional buildings to be used as homes. The team was impressed with the energy and positive attitude of the elders and inhabitants of the settlement, and decided to return with humanitarian supplies.

15. (U) The Civil Affairs Team returned to the site in June with a load of humanitarian materials that included school supplies for teachers and students,

KABUL 00004368 002.2 OF 003

hygiene and health supplies, wash basins and tool kits. During this visit, team members who had visited in April were amazed at the transformation. While UNHCR tents were still visible, most now were inside fully or partially completed walled compounds, while many more mud brick and kiln brick buildings were completed or under construction. A small white-painted mosque, complete with separate washroom, had been built with funding by an unnamed donor, and the area was beginning to look like an organized Afghan village.

16. (U) The settlement leaders expressed appreciation for U.S. efforts. These included USAID-funded repairs to the road through the village that connects it to Jalalabad, a project which also provided jobs for many residents. They were also grateful for the humanitarian and school supplies, but asked for assistance in building a school for the children and a clinic for health care. The PRT explained that it could only undertake building projects if the land had been formally allocated to the returnees. One leader noted that they had not been given or even promised the land, but it belonged to the Government of Afghanistan, and they were Afghans who were making significant improvements, so he was confident they would be allowed to stay.

Procedural and Political Obstacles...

17. (U) Despite the settlement leadership's confidence, neither the U.S. nor other international donors or agencies were in a position to proceed with fixed structures or substantial assistance until the land issues were resolved, or there was at least a firm statement of intent by Afghan authorities to allocate the land. Given the obvious

self-reliance and hard work of this group of refugees, the PRT decided to try to help resolve the land issues. After talking with several Afghan officials and making little progress, the PRT invited and transported Governor Sherzai to the site. Impressed by what the returnees had accomplished, the Governor assured both them and the PRT that the land would be theirs.

¶8. (U) Unfortunately, the Governor does not have the authority to carry out such actions without support from others. Jalalabad Mayor Stanikzai and Deputy Governor Ishaqzai expressed reservations, noting that the area might already be designated for another purpose. On August 6, the PRT transported the Deputy Governor and the Mayor -- both well-known contacts -- out to the site. Lacking either a school building or government-provided teachers, the group had managed to acquire several large tents from UNICEF through the Ministry of Education, identified their own teachers, and using school supplies provided by the PRT, a Swedish NGO, and others, the almost 450 young children in the community had started back to school -- earlier than their compatriots in other Afghan schools to make up for lost time. The Deputy Governor, who happens to be a teacher, reveled in interactions with the children. The Mayor noted that his municipal engineer was doing preliminary work in the next

KABUL 00004368 003.2 OF 003

village toward Jalalabad and he would be pleased to send his experts to Tangi to help them with their planning.

¶9. (U) On the land issue, the two officials remained hesitant, primarily because there are two other officially sanctioned returnee locations near Jalalabad (Sheikh Misri and Gamberi) where Nangarharis either are or will be living. The officials were concerned that if they moved too quickly on the unofficial Tangi settlement, they would face complaints that they were helping "outsiders" -- people from Kunar -- before helping their own.

...Possibly Overcome

¶10. (U) The UNHCR Representative, whom we had also invited to join us, informed the group that a substantial amount of international donor money available to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation for projects, including township planning, remained almost untapped. He promised that if the Nangarhar authorities applied for some of this money for all three settlements at the same time, he would work to get the applications approved and funded. This would avoid the perception of putting one group ahead of the others. He also offered a plan by which donors could provide assistance while the land allocation issues were being resolved. Nangarhar authorities could work with Sheikh Misri and Gamberi first, as they were currently doing, and take action on Tangi after the others were well underway. For now, they had only to provide written notification of the intention to allocate the land to the Tangi community, and that would be enough for donors to proceed.

Comment

¶11. (U) After the successful August 6 excursion, the PRT and UNHCR are confident that the formal allocation of land, or at least the notification of

intent, will move forward fairly quickly. (The PRT Commander followed up with provincial officials on Sept. 25 and he remains optimistic approval for the land allocation will come soon.) The Tangi returnee settlement is an example of what motivated and hard-working Afghans can do in their own country, and it is also an example of how a PRT can make a difference -- even when project money is tight or non-existent.